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ENG 2009G-051: Race, Age, and Gender

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ENG 2009: RACE, AGE, AND GENDER

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Summer 2005
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Office hours: MTW 12-1 & by appointment

Required Texts

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*
Nella Larsen, *Passing*
Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*
J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*
Edmund White, *A Boy's Own Story*

Short readings may be placed for download at Booth Library's electronic reserves website.

The words that make up the title to this course—"Race," "Age," and "Gender"—might prompt one to assume that this is a literature course dealing primarily with non-whites, the aged, and women. This is because at the turn of the twenty-first century, we've become used to equating such categories with those who are designated as marginal within the scope of those categories: that's why professors who specialize in "gender studies" can be safely assumed to be female, why authors who write about their own "ethnicity" so often seem to be non-white, why the term "ageism" is usually understood as a form of discrimination against the elderly. But in fact we are all stakeholders in the topoi of race, age, and gender, and accordingly, this course will offer students a chance to read and discuss literature that meditates over the nature of those stakes in provocative, meaningful ways.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & POLICIES:

Final Grades will be determined in accordance with this formula:

Oral discussion.....	20%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	20%
Final Paper	20%
Participation	20%
	100%

A discussion initiated by you, for which you will gather up an item from recent news or contemporary culture and use it to get the class thinking about the text up for discussion in new and interesting ways. For instance, you might find an item from the New York Times that bears upon some set of concerns also at play in the novel we are discussing, or a review of an art exhibit, film, cd, or play that helps us to unpack some particular scene in that novel, some turn of phrase, some representation, some image, some metaphor, some turn the narrative takes. Whatever secondary text you take up, it should come from a reputable source (items from the

New York Times, Wired, Arts and Letters Daily, or the Chicago Tribune are fine, obviously—items from anonymous, unreviewed web sites are not; if you have doubts about what constitutes a viable secondary source, see me). On a day I will assign, you will come into class with enough copies of your secondary text to distribute to everyone, and prepared to talk for perhaps ten minutes as a way of generating an interesting discussion about our primary text—the novel we're currently reading. As I grade these discussions, I'll be looking for clarity and eloquence, but also the sort of engagement that makes others get engaged. In other words, your goal here is to get others in the class involved in a self-sustaining conversation about our primary text and the issues it raises vis á vis your secondary text.

A final paper, about 7-8 pages long, on a topic of your choosing. (titled, twelve-point font, double-spaced, pages numbered after the first, one-inch margins on all sides, on 8 1/2"x11" white paper, no title page necessary). Final essays should argue a specific thesis about a narrative or a pair of closely related narratives and should call upon at least two secondary sources documented on a works cited page and cited in accordance with the MLA system. I encourage everyone in the class to speak with me well before the due date in order to discuss possible topics for the final paper. **Note:** If such things interest you, I will be more than usually open to alternative projects (websites? hypertext essays? films?) if they relate to the themes of the course. If you have an idea, speak with me about it well before the due date.

Two examinations, a midterm to be held on May 26 and a final to be held during the examinations period (date and time TBA). These exams will consist of an objective section and an essay section, both designed to measure the closeness of your reading.

Participation in discussion: The course will be conducted primarily as a discussion course (with occasional, short lectures from me). As you surely know by now, such a course is only truly successful if a high percentage of students participate; it can be unappealing if the "discussion" turns into a dialogue between the professor and a small handful of students. Therefore I expect students to come to class as strong class citizens who work hard to make discussion run well. To make the discussion run well: 1) you should plan on participating—at least making a comment or asking a question—every day; 2) you should be careful not to dominate discussion (i.e., those of you who are not shy should give other students an opening to participate); 3) you should participate with tact and civility (take other people's remarks and questions seriously, don't interrupt, respond courteously, etc.). The grade for participation (20% of your final grade) will depend upon meeting all these criteria.

Occasional quizzes will be brief, and are designed to encourage everyone to keep up with the reading. Results will factor heavily into participation grades.

Attendance: With two absences, students will be considered overcut. Overcutting may result in the reduction of the final course grade by a grade or more, depending upon frequency. In the case of an excused absence (as defined by EIU university-wide policy), your excuse must be made in writing, accompanied by the appropriate documentation, and given to me no later than the first class meeting following the absence. In no case may a student accumulate more than five absences, either excused or unexcused, and still pass the course – if illness or other extenuating circumstances cause you to miss more than five classes, you should petition for a withdrawal.

One last word related to attendance: I ask that students who have not read the text on the day it is to be discussed not bother coming. Such students cannot contribute anything valuable to the discussion, and in any case it is dishonest for them to benefit from the efforts of others by listening in on their conversations without offering anything of their own. Always read the assigned materials carefully, but if for some reason you have not, don't bother showing up.

Students who habitually show up for class a few minutes after it's started should find a professor who's into that and take their course instead. This professor is insulted by it and reacts badly.

Academic honesty: Students are of course responsible for knowing Eastern Illinois University regulations and policies regarding academic honesty. Plagiarism, even if unknowing or accidental, can result in your failing the course and in further action by the university. Please note the English Department's statement on plagiarism:

Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism – "The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's own original work" (Random House Dictionary of the English Language) – has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignments, of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, feel free to ask me to clarify. Also, please make a point of noting the following: I will not tolerate any form of academic dishonesty in this course. If I come to suspect misconduct of any kind, I will become dogged about rooting it out, and if my suspicions are confirmed, I will dispense appropriate penalties.

Students are responsible for reading all of the material on this syllabus on the date assigned whether or not the work is actually discussed on that date. Students are cautioned that many of the readings are lengthy. I urge you to begin these readings as soon as possible. Occasionally, I will pass out brief, photocopied materials not represented on the syllabus, or I will distribute such materials electronically; these are to be read by the next class.

Please do not use e-mail as a way to avoid me. When you have a question, problem, or concern, I want to sit down with you and talk. That's why I keep office hours, and in fact, why I am a teacher. I also want to talk with you about interesting ideas you have this semester, just as I want to talk with you—personally—about the readings we take on. And it seems to me that too many students use e-mail as a way to avoid actually interacting with their professors, a practice I resist obstinately. When you need or want to communicate with me, attend my office hours, call me at my office (581.6302), or if it's very important and the other avenues have not worked, call me at home (348.6144). We'll talk.

READING SCHEDULE

MONDAY 5/16:	Introductions, course overview
TUESDAY 5/17	Salinger, <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i> pp. 1-104
WEDNESDAY 5/18:	Salinger, <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i> pp. 105-214
THURSDAY 5/19:	Text(s) or film TBA
MONDAY 5/23:	Nabokov, <i>Lolita</i> 5-101
TUESDAY 5/24:	Nabokov, <i>Lolita</i> 101-202
WEDNESDAY 5/25:	Nabokov, <i>Lolita</i> 203-281
THURSDAY 5/26:	Midterm exam
MONDAY 5/30:	Larsen, <i>Passing</i>
TUESDAY 5/31:	Ellison, <i>Invisible Man</i> 1-135
WEDNESDAY 6/1:	Ellison, <i>Invisible Man</i> 136-295
THURSDAY 6/2:	Ellison, <i>Invisible Man</i> 296-444
MONDAY 6/6:	Ellison, <i>Invisible Man</i> 445-581
TUESDAY 6/7:	conferences in my office—no class meeting

WEDNESDAY 6/8: conferences in my office—no class meeting

THURSDAY 6/9: text(s) TBA